

A
LETTER
TO A
LADY.



A
LETTER *1602. 6. 3.*
TO A
LADY.

In Praise of

Female LEARNING.

*The Prudent value nothing less
Than Titles, Figure, Shape and Dress ;
But Merit still by them is plac'd
In Judgment, Knowledge, Wit and Taste.
Caden. and Venessa.*



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THE
DEDICATION
TO A
Lady of MERIT.

MADAM,

WHILE all Serene, from Court retir'd, you
feast
On pure Delights and Joys unmixt you taste,
And with unutterable Transport find
The sacred Calmness of a virtuous Mind ;
The Muse salutes thee in thy soft Retreat,
Remov'd from Noise and hurry'd Scences of State.

From thee, polite, in ev'ry female Art,
Blest with the Graces of a Christian Heart,
Embellisht with Serenity of Mind,
Mature in Wisdom and in Taste refin'd ;
From ev'ry Blemish of the Soul remov'd,
With ev'ry Elegance of Mind improv'd,

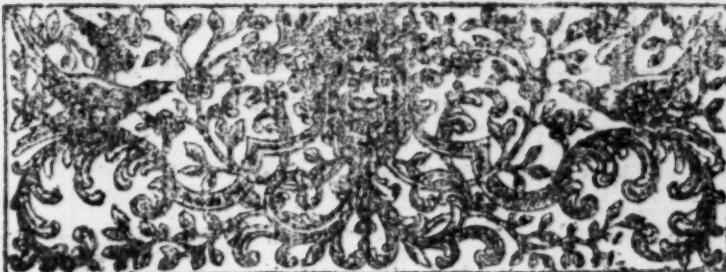
Whom

D E D I C A T I O N.

Whom all the Beauties of thy Sex array—
I beg Protection to this small Essay.

When the young Shepherd in th' Idæan Shade
The three contending Goddesses survey'd,
The blue-ey'd Nymph with Love's restless Queen
And *Jove*'s immortal Consort grac'd the Scene.
One promis'd Power, another deathless Fame
But *Venus* offer'd him the *Spartan* Dame.
Confus'd a While in deep Suspence he stood
While three contending Passions fir'd his Blood.
At length his trembling Voice and partial Eyes
To *Venus* gave immortal Beauty's Prize;
Had then th' Athenian Maid put on thy Face
Thy Form, thy Mien, thy ev'ry other Grace,
The Queen of soft Desire her Loss had mourn'd
And *Priam*'s antient Walls had never burn'd;
Nor would the Youth have been so rash or blind
To chuse a Form regardless of the Mind,
While to thy graceful Form new Charms impart
Th' exalted Beauties of a blameless Heart,
In ev'ry Character of Life you shine
With lovely Excellence and Worth divine.

W. W.



A

LETTER

TO A

LADY, &c.

*Learning appears most amiably refin'd
When join'd with Virtue in a Female Mind.*

MADAM,

AFew Evenings before I left Dublin, as I happen'd to be sauntering about a Coffee House when tir'd with the Expectation of a Friend, who appointed to meet me there, I took up a News-paper to kill a few Minutes till my Friend might come. It was the *Dublin Journal*, dated December

ember the 9th, 1738. which began with an ill-spelt
 teaguish Letter from a Country Female to *Simon Wagstaff*, Esq; The Words were so oddly patch'd up that I was oblig'd to peruse it twice before I could read it to Advantage. Being ask'd what I thought on't, I freely gave my Opinion that it was a made thing, design'd by some unpolite Fop as a Slur upon the illiterate of that Sex ; I was shortly surrounded by a Circle of other Saunterers who vouch'd the Letter to be genuine, I would not give up my Belief of the Contrary ; but at the same time insinuated that, if the Letter was genuine, it plainly shew'd the Necessity of Learning in the Female World ; and that it was ungenerous to expose or laugh at the incorrect Writing of the Fair, when by the Austerity and Rudeness of our Sex they are so generally depriv'd of the proper Means of removing such Imperfections. This involv'd me in a Controversy of great Concern ; and, as the Ladies have hitherto been pleased to take my small Labours into their Favour and Protection, I was directed by my Duty to fight their Quarrel, which I did to the utmost of my Power. I was unluckily defeated by a promiscuous Contradiction, for I could not distinguish the Arguments. As I was sitting in the Dumps my Friend came, who is a young Gentleman of Genius and is likewise upon all laudable Occasions devoted to the Service of the Fair. Another Gentleman joined us (for which he shall always live in my Esteem) and then I took Courage to resume my Proposition. Nine of us, being all Intimates, retir'd to a Tavern, and there our Dispute became more regular. We form'd two Parties, three of a Side, and chose Mr. P—, H—, S— A. M. for our Moderator. We had none in the Room but the nine. When a rouzing Fire was made, the Glasses laid on the Table, half a Dozen of Wine plac'd in a Corner and the Door bolted, our Disputation was open'd according to Method.

By

By our Party female Learning was highly esteem'd and fervently recommended. By the other it was strenuously oppos'd and cry'd down as a Motive rather to increase than correct their Levity and Haughtiness. They insisted farther that the Needle and the Wheel were the Proper Weapons of Women ; that Females were never in their own Sphere unless sewing, nursing, or taking Care of their Houses, and that, according to the Spectator, the Province of a Woman lay in her own Family altogether in domestick Employments. We prov'd the Embellishments of the Mind and the Attainment of useful Learning to be much better Weapons for the Fair than either the Needle or the Wheel ; and that such Acquisitions put them under no Necessity of neglecting their Family Affairs. Another Objection against us was, that homebred Girls, who could write little more than their Names, were the safest from the Importunities of loose young Fellows ; for that their Addresses, being for the most Part delivered in the softest and most elegant Stile, might often prove too persuasive for Girls of Wit and Alacrity vested in the Mysteries of the learned World ; and again, that Female Learning was of little Service to the Preservation of Chastity, regular Affections, conubial Obedience, Humility, Industry, Frugality, and such simple Virtues which were the proper Ornaments of the Female Sex.

Our Answer to this Thesis was that Learning (which makes the Fair an Ornament to their own Sex and the Admiration of ours) qualifies them to distinguish between Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, and leads them to a disquisition of Truth ; the Knowledge of which arms them against the Assaults of all unworthy Pursuits and Actions, and directs them safely to a happy Choice. It would be tedious to bring in all the Arguments that were advanced against

gainst us, but after a Debate of above two Hours, our Antagonists had very little to say. Their rudeness to the Fair did not pass untold, nor was even Mr. Spec. our meanest Evidence against them. From my private Reflections on this Debate I have collected the following Thoughts, which I shall write down by incoherent Parcels as they occur'd to me.

My Design in this Essay is to introduce the Necessity of Female Learning by shewing the Inconveniences that generally attend the Want of it: But, Madam, wherever I shall hint at those Inconveniences, such Ladies as are adorned with the Advantages of a polite Education must be pleas'd to know that they are quite out of the Question. In this Rank, Madam, you are placed by the nicest Judges and Envy owns your Merit. In your search after Knowledge you are happily crown'd with the Attainment of every desirable Erudition, and the Charms of your Person yield to the Beauties of your Mind. I therefore hope your Candour will be pleased with my present Undertaking.

It is preach'd up by several to Ladies that nothing can be a greater Sign of their Humility and Modesty than to acquiesce in such Employments and Exercises as Women are generally engag'd in; and not to aspire at such Knowledge as is quite out of their Sphere and was never design'd for them. By others it is objected that Learning is apt to make them vain and assuming. It is granted that a smattering in Science may have that Effect; but surely Philosophy (which is the Life and Energy of Knowledge) can never so grossly impose upon the Mind. The chief Work of such Learning is to warm and activate the Soul in the noble Search of Truth, to improve the Mind, to enlarge the Faculties, and to rectify the Understanding. For this Reason Cicero calls Wisdom the Princess and Guide of all other

Virtues

Virtues and that wherein the Knowledge of our Sovereign Good and the End of our Being consist ; as also the Choice of those Means by which we may attain it. *Solomon* gives us an elegant Description of it.

I remember to have read the Characters of many fine Ladies who in former Ages had all the Philosophers untranslated for the Ornaments of their Closets, and that valued themselves more upon their Progress in Learning than all their other Charms. By this they were enabled to look into the History of past Ages, and to learn the Methods of God's Providence over the World ; and by reading the Writings of the antient Sages they discovered the Excellencies of Wisdom and Virtue, and fortified their Minds by the Strength of their Precepts, the Strictness of their Rules and the sublime Doctrines of Piety, which they with so much Elegance recommended. Among those Heroines the glorious Queen *Elizabeth* was universally distinguished ; and was in this, as in many other Respects, equally worthy to be admired and imitated : The Ladies of this Age are as capable as they, and have as great a Desire to be thought polite as they had. What then is the Reason that so many of them are not really so ? What is the Obstacle ? Are they startled at the Undertaking or is it the singularity of the Thing ? Is an ingenuous, well-bred Woman such a Prodigy ? Are the Ladies of this Age apprehensive of being stared at or admired for being so ? If the Reputation of those Ladies, which has so long surviv'd them, be approv'd of, why is not their Example followed ? Imitation is a Debt we owe to every thing we praise. Surely then, such Ladies are greatly overseen who so exactly imitate every Start-up Fashion and at the same time neglect what most deserves Imitation. It is a much more laudable Employment for a Lady to spend some early Hours in the Improvement of the Mind

Mind than in consulting the Glass — upon the State of her Health and Beauty. It must likewise be allowed that she will receive more Profit and solid Pleasure from reading ingenious Authors than from wearing out the Morning in ranging in order her Essences, Perfumes, Combs, Pomatums, Washes, Patches, &c. and in placing and unplacing all the Trinkets of the Toilet, all which makes up no more than Contrivance in Folly and Confusion in Order.

It is falsely and rudely asserted by several of the Wrong-Heads that Women have no Souls. This is an Absurdity easily confuted ; yet with Concern I tell it ; that many young Ladies are brought up as if that Assumption were true ; there is such an expensive Care taken about their Bodies. For the first seven Years they are thought unfit for Instruction and so their little Passions sprout up without controul. When their Reason begins to sparkle, they are led into the Dressing-Room to be taught the Mysteries of the Glass and the Secrets of the Toilet, where they immediately learn which Wash clears the Complexion, which conserves and which repairs it ; and thus Beauty becomes the first Object of their Care. As their Years advance, according to their Improvement in the Dancing School, at Plays, Balls, Operas, Ridottos, &c. their Passions increase with their Vanity and grow above all Restraint.

Then Folly of Course becomes their Guide, and Levity their Companion. Now what can be expected of a young Lady thus brought up in Ease, in the gaudy Amusements of high Life and in an utter Ignorance of serious Instruction ?

The fatal Source of all female Mismanagement and the true Origin of all their Failings is bad Education ;

cation ; and to be brought up in the Study of Dres and the Neglect of reading can bear no softer Name. Good Education does not consist in Dancing, Dres-sing, or in the Ceremonies of Visiting, but in the Improvement of Reason ; in suggesting to the Mind what is wise and pure ; in helping us to discover and subdue every vain Passion of our Hearts, and every false Judgment of our Minds ; but bad Impressions on Youth are like *Italian Poisons*, that Work for Years after they are taken ; and the Mistakes in Education (such as to be nurst up in Pride and Delicacy, in Ease and Vanity, in Gaiety and Luxury and the other Errors attending high Life) like an Error in the first Concoction, spread their noxious Influences through all the succeeding Scenes of Life.

Sinice Women as well as Men have intelligent Souls, why should they be debarr'd from the Improvements of them ? If it were intended by Nature that Man should monopolize all Learning to himself, why were the Muses female ? who (as *Orpheus* observes in *Hymn. Mus.*) were the Mistresses of all the Sciences and the Presidents of Musick and Poetry ? Since Heaven has not deny'd the Faculty of thinking to the fair Sex ; why should they be confin'd to low and home bred Studies ? Before they set themselves upon any sublime Enquiries, it is necessary they should examine their own Abilities and see what Objects their Understandings are able to deal with : But nothing can be more reasonable than that W^men, as well as Men, should have light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker and the Sight of their own Duties. They have an equal right to furnish themselves with solid and useful Knowledge, and since the Beauties of the Mind are so often required to secure the Conquests that their Eyes have made, it would be cruel and unjust to exempt them from such additional Ornaments

as even Time can have no Influence on but to improve and to embellish them. As it may be affirm'd that for the most Part there is a finer Sense, a nicer Taste, a readier Apprehension, a clearer Mind, and a gentler Disposition in the female Sex than ours; it is not to be question'd but that, if those Tempers were rightly improv'd by proper Studies, they would make a greater Figure in Learning, and be more eminent Instances of an exalted Deity than are found among the generality of Men. If they were but allowed this Privilege, I greatly suspect they would often prove our Superiors.

Tho' Self-admiration always eclipses the Lustre of a Lady's Beauty, yet in them Emulation is highly commendable so far as it is supported by essential Merit; and therefore it is not fair to deny them the Means of examining and judging what in reality is so. Such an Imposition may be attended with pernicious Consequences; for it is evident to all judicious and impartial Persons, that the more contracted and unemploy'd the deliberating and directing Power of the Mind is, the more liable is the elective to unworthy and discommendable Options.

The Understanding is the most elevated Faculty of the Soul, and is employ'd with greater and more constant delight than any of the other: so that, if the Understanding be well inform'd, the moral Conduct of the Will is pure and upright; but irregular and inconstant if the other be weak and deluded. Hence it appears that, if a Lady does not lay out and cultivate the Powers of her Soul into a regular Garden, they will of themselves shoot up in Weeds and Flowers of the wildest growth; and this has been

been elegantly observ'd by some of the antient Poets :
 * By Horace and Ovid.

That young Lady who has no greater Excellencies to value herself upon, will be proud of her Family, Fortune, Beauty, &c. and those Externals are sufficient to swell her with Vanity enough to put in her Claims for univerial Esteem ; she not knowing that such empty Conceits will enervate her Mind, debauch her Reason, expose her to the Adulation, Impertinences, and insinuating Attempts of deluding Persons, and deface her Behaviour with Self-love and Arrogance ; whereas, she who has obtain'd a well informed and discerning Mind, sees through and despises all the frustrate Artifices that are used to subvert her Honour and Virtue..

Again, she, who understands wherein the Perfections of her Nature consist, will lay out her Invention and Endeavours in the Attainment of such Perfections : but she, who wants Judgment to distinguish between Reality and Appearance, is apt to take up with the first Objects that offer, if they bear any plausible resemblance to what she desires, nor can any better be justly expected than that, when a young Lady is taught to value herself upon her Dres, Beauty, Fortune or any other outward Graces, she should (as her Judgment is weak and unimprov'd) at once be dazzled with Fine-ry and fall in with the Vain and the Gay, who are generally attended with so much Admiratio and Courtefy. Hence it appears that Ignorance and illiterate Education are the prime Motives to all the

* Neglectis urenda filex iniufatur Agris.

HOR.

Fertilis affiduo si non renovetur aratro

Nil nisi cum spinis Gramen habebit Humus----- OVID.

imprudent Choices of the fair Sex, and that Imitation and Custom establish them for Habits : For an Application to Vanity destroys the Contexture and Frame of any Mind, and then an habitual Inadvertency renders it incapable of any heroic Acquirements, until at last it becomes as frothy and volatile as the Things it converses with. Where then is the great Surprize when such young Ladies as are thus brought up are unhappy in their Choices, and are ready to receive Fops, Rakes, Butterflies and Beaux for their Husbands, who tho' they make gay and modish Husbands, frequently leave entail'd upon their Wives and Families the pernicious Consequences of a desolute Libertine Life ? It would not be fair to expect that they shall dislike Vanity and Fondness of Finery in Men when they are taught to admire it in themselves.

A Woman that prefers the Ornaments of her Body those of her Mind is incapable of receiving the Life and Spirit of Piety, that depraved Temper is attended with a thousand Follies, and renders the whole Course of a Lady's Life, her Conversation and Solitude, her Busines and Diversions, her Hopes and Fears, her Taste and Pleasures, all suitable to it.

The imprudent Neglect of reading good and learned Authors gives Life to every idle Temper, supports every trifling Passion and keeps the Mind from all Thoughts of a prudent, useful Life. Mr. *Law* (in his serious Call to a devout and holy Life) observes that, as Consideration is the only Eye of the Soul, and, as the Truths of Religion can be seen by nothing else, so whatever raises a Levity of Mind, a trifling Spirit, renders the Soul incapable of seeing, apprehending, and relishing the Doctrines of Piety.

A Spirit devoted to Pleasures and Diversions is a Slave to every Passion in its turn, and is by a supine Ignorance

Ignorance led astray into the Neglect of every necessary Duty.

It is confess that the Integrity of Persons who know but little engages us to overlook that wherein they ignorantly transgress ; but no Folly can be more indecent or inglorious than a stupid supine Indifference to Learning and Politeness. What is it but the Want of Learning that often makes Female Conversation so petulant, inconsiderate, censorious or insipid, and renders their Solitude so insupportable ? What is it that makes them have so many dull half Days and lets such a considerable Part of their time lie heavy on their Hands ? Surely they can't charge Learning with either. A prudent, learned Lady is Abroad both useful and agreeable, and at Home she can entertain herself ; but what a restless, trifling Piece of Furniture is an illiterate Female in a rainy Day ? Her Understanding is over-run with Weeds ; and let her Appearance be ever so graceful, she at best turns out but like a Tulip in a Garden, that carries all its Beauties without, and is good for nothing within.

The Education of Women is of the utmost Importance to human Life ; because, as they are the Mistresses of Families and are intrusted with the grounding of the first Principles in their Children of both Sexes, so Women of good or bad Education can do as much Good or as much Mischief in their own Sphere, as good or bad Men can do in the greatest Business of Life. And to strengthen this Assumption, it will appear upon the nicest Enquiry that the Fondness or Folly of our Minds is in a great Measure owing to the Principles we imbib'd from our Mothers ; who generally in the Nursery communicate all their Excellencies or Defects to their tender Offspring. The first Impressions frequently stick the Closet.

The Opinion is taken from *Socrates* that, as we call our first Language our Mother-Tongue, so we may as justly call our first Tempers, our Mothers Tempers; for they have the first forming of our Bodies and our Minds.

From the Flattery of external Objects arises that Querulousness and Delicacy of Temper which many Ladies affect * and mistake for a Piece of nice Breeding and Grandeur; and from the same Original proceed their Levity and Inconstancy, than either of which nothing can be more Fantastical, nothing can give greater Evidence of a weak, injudicious Mind. But the noble Effects of sound Learning are vastly more generous and sublime. It models and rectifies our Inclinations; it directs us how to be merry without Folly, cheerful without Levity, gay without Vanity, affable without Flattery, and grave without Formality. It corrects our Passions and strengthens our Resolutions. It conforms our Dispositions to the Practice of what we know, and thereby to approve our selves to the Divine Author of Knowledge: And, to the End that this great Design may be the better pursued and effectually obtained, our Understandings are thereby made clear, and comprehensive, as well as our Affections regular, and our Knowledge able to govern our Zeal. We are directed by Learning to make frequent and exact Enquiries into our own Hearts, that by fully understanding the Weakness of human Nature we may be the better able to bear with its Defects and by the most prudent methods to procure its Amendment. Thus we are brought to a compleat Government of ourselves, to rule our Passions according to Reason, not according to Humour. Learning re-

* See the Farce call'd the *TOY-SHOP*.

presents Virtue in all her Charms and native Loveliness ; it joins the Strictness of Philosophy to the sweetness of Humanity ; both which together, being improv'd and heighten'd by Grace are the Principal Ingredients required to make up an accomplish'd Christian, and is your lovely Sex to be deprived of the Means whereby to purchase that great Character ? nothing can be more unjust, nothing more ungenerous. Men that argue against Learning in Females can consider them in no other View, than as so many soft-out, empty, vain Creatures, fitted up to allure and gratify their Passions. And what can be a baser Affront or a greater Indignity offered to so noble a Part of the Creation ? They are abus'd and injured, when they are told that any thing can be an Ornament in the wisest of Men that would not likewise be an Ornament in them.

The Wheel or Needle or any other innocent, useful Work may help to preserve a sedate Frame of Mind and to quicken its Aversion to Sloth and Idleness : But nothing can so well secure it from foolish Passions as reading Scriptures and moral Philosophy.

She, whose Mind is embellish'd with sound and useful Learning, when blest with a virtuous Humility, is the best bred and best temper'd, adorn'd with a thousand engaging Charms most happy in herself and most agreeable and beneficial to all she converses with : It is therefore a lazy and ignoble Carelessness to undervalue the Advantages of Learning, or to neglect the Improvement of Knowledge to the Ends for which it was given.

When one Lady who is distinguish'd, for her Merit is commended in the Presence of another who is diffident of her own Worth, the latter is apt to be assaulted.

assaulted with Blushes, Prejudice and Resentment ; and thinks the Praise given to the former detracts from her Character. Here she discovers the Weakness of her own Heart, and is condemn'd by her own and not anothers Judgment. It is observable that we are never angry with others but when we know or suspect their Opinions of us to be contrary to that which we entertain of our selves. However all ingenuous People conclude that to commend any Person without just Grounds is no more than in a modish way to rob the deserving of that which only belongs to them.

A decent Share of Vanity seldom sits uneasy on the fair Sex, which makes me often admire how their Emulation can sleep in an Affair of such Importance ; and that all their Endeavours are not laid out to come up to the Character of those Ladies, whose Acquirements are so frequently represented in all their Lustre. Learning is a more real Ornament than Dress, and the Beauties of the Mind are vastly superior to those of the Body. Is it not strange then that the Fashions take up so much of the Ladies Thoughts and that the generous Improvements of Learning should be so supinely rejected ? With great Deference to the Sex I speak ; but the only Way that I can account for it is this.

When such mistaken Ladies look into their own Minds, they find so many Disorders to be rectified and so many Wants to be supplied, that they are startled at the Thoughts of repairing so many Defects ; and so, being ashamed to confess their Ignorance, they inadvertently sink into several female Weaknesses, in this case it is but a disagreeable Civility to attempt letting in the Rays of Understanding upon such Minds as are used to subsist in the Dark. (That would be as an eminent Modern observes) like opening Day-light upon a Nest of Owls.

If it were but universally considered that Women have as great a Share in the rational World as Men have, and that they have as much Reason to aspire at the highest Virtues and Accomplishments as the graveſt and wifest of Christian Philosophers; how many Blessings and Ornaments might we reasonably expect from the Fair Sex who are formed by their natural Tempers to all Goodness and Tenderness, and ſo adapted by the clearneſs and brightness of their Minds to admire and imitate every thing that is Polite, Virtuous and Divine.

Whatever Levity of Mind may be obſerved in the female World is not at all owing to the Principles of their Nature but to the Tempers that are wrought into them by a depraved Education. Yet if that rude and false Assumption of Female Tempers being naturally vain and light were granted, how blameable muſt that Education be, which, instead of correcting or removing ſuch innate Weakneſſes, ſeems rather to be artfully contrived to strengthen and encrease their Folly? How greatly then is the World infatuated when the generality of People conſpire to make the moſt delicate Part of the Creation ſleep in Ignorance, and to give up all their Thoughts to Vanity and the various Arts of improving their Dress, to the diſferent Ceremonies in viſiting, the idle Entertainments and Diverſions that are invented to chouſe them out of their Caſh and Wit together?

It is not long ſince I was introduced to a large Circle of Ladies, ſome of whom had (I am convinc'd) a delicate Taste, a refin'd Genius, and an improv'd Judgment. While I was moſt agreeably entertain'd by a few of them, who had withdrawn from the major Part into one Corner of the Room,

there

there appeared a certain Disorder and Confusion among others, which detected the Levity of injudicious Minds. I observed that one Lady of a lively Mien and florid Conversation and that display'd an unaffected Ease in all her Deportment, frequently entertain'd the rest with somewhat new and polite ; yet, because her Jests were not so pert or fantastical as others, as soon as she had taken leave, she was unmercifully ridicul'd and laugh'd at by the giggling Girls for being a formal Creature, destitute of all Wit and Sprightliness. So modish is Censoriousness, tipt with a little Scandal, among such Ladies, whose Minds are unimprov'd, that Gravity passes for Stupidity, sedateness for Formality, Piety for Hypocrisy, Loquacity for Wit, Raillery for fine Conversation, and fulsome Compliments for Gallantry and Politeness. How shall a Lady behave when so many of her Sex acquiesce in such capital Errors.

It is highly convenient for such among the fair Illiterates, who are so taken up with their own Tattling, as rarely to consult whether they speak to the purpose or not, so they talk a great deal, to be inform'd that the most difficult Piece of good breeding is to know when to use and when to hold one's Tongue, and that Politeness often takes up with Silence and Eloquence with Persons of few Words. Silence (*says Tacitus*) is a sweet Eloquence, for Fools in their Silence are accounted wise. Carry thy Thoughts seal'd up in Silence (*says Cicero*) for it a special Excellence to speak little and well.

Some Ladies are apt to imagine themselves well read when they have run over a Parcel of Plays, light Poems, Romances and Novels ; but here they greatly impose upon themselves. Such reading is indeed

indeed allowable and innocently entertaining ; but, unless great Care be taken, instead of fortifying and improving the Genius, it rather forwards it in the pursuit of Folly, and palls the Relish for sublimer Truths. But the perusal of judicious Authors puts Ladies in the Way of ingenious Conversation and of exalting all their Pleasures by refining them. It will enable them to form adequate Ideas of the Dignity of their Nature, it will regulate their Affections, enliven their Spirits, and enlarge their Prospects : Whereas Ignorance, Pride and Levity are inseparable Diseases of the Mind ; which, like a Coinplication of corporeal Distempers, nourish and foment one another.

Here I am not for persuading Ladies to such Studies as are not suitable to their Sex. I only excite them to a Disquisition of such Truths as will principle them in their own Duty, and to be so conversant in Philosophy as to be able to form in their Minds true Ideas of the Author of Existence, their own Beings and the Purposes for which they were made, that they may conform their Knowledge to the Practice of Generosity and Virtue, and be able to tell the Reasons why they do so : And this demands a clear Understanding and improved Mind, and unprejudiced Spirit and Serenity of Thought ; that all together may move the Will to a direct pursuit of Good, and a stedfast Adherence thereto : For, if the Understanding be ignorant and cloudy, it is but by Chance if the Will be right. Then is there not more pleasure in the Acquisition of such Knowledge and more Credit than in the Invention of a new Fashion, in dressing up to the Mode, or finding out new Ways to preserve or recover a Complexion ? Such Amusements are like Whipt-Sillybubs that may please the Eye, but never nourish the Stomach.

Madam,

Madam, in this Epistle, I would not be understood to use too great a Severity against the Fair. My chief Design is to plead their Interest, to vindicate their natural Dispositions, to commend their Genius, to set forth their Perfections and Sweetness of Tempers, and to assert their Right: But I hope, it will be allowed that the natural Tendency that an illiterate Education has to oppose their Interests, is sufficient to justify the most absolute Condemnation of it.

Such, Madam, are the hasty Thoughts that have offer'd themselves to me upon this Subject: all which I humbly submit to your Protection.

I am, Madam,

With great Deference,

Your Most Obedient

Servant.

17 NO 63

*Kilmore, Feb. 5th.
1738-9.*

W. W.